



## LESSONS IN LISTENING

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In a world where everything moves faster...every year, those who have the challenge of leading others are often caught between the “rock” of what used to work and the “hard place” of what might work. During my 25 year career in some of America’s greatest organizations, I have found one skill that never gets old and always needs a refresher: the ability to listen.

What comes to mind when you hear the word listening? Is it that glazed over look you get when you’re trapped between the printer and the water-cooler by the person I call the “Big FishTalker?” You know this person...no matter what story or idea you share he/she “always” has something to out-do you. Or do you envision the incessant head nodding you’re forced to do when your boss rattles off a string of 19 commands that must be completed in varying intervals of time and complexity? Whatever comes to mind, I think you would probably agree that as humans our ability to listen is paramount to our success.

Here are a few lessons I’ve learned and worked hard to leverage over the years.

### **I Listen, Therefore I Understand**

What would happen if you considered the definition of listening to be understanding? Yes, imagine how your approach might change if you decided that you haven’t listened well if you don’t truly understand the person’s point of view “and” the feelings behind that point of view.

### **Listen While You Work**

Second, consider that listening is a proactive process. Listening is hard work. Effective listening means that you have to simultaneously avoid focusing on your thoughts, opinions and style. Instead, you have to be so other-centered that you strive to really “get” the other person.

### **Deep Dive**

Third, the best listeners are the persons who paraphrase deeply versus those who parrot effectively. Simply put, great listening is not the same as being able to mimic the words, inflections and pauses of the speaker. That’s parroting. Great listening requires that you rephrase what you understood to be the person’s intent, motivation and feeling. In other words, your paraphrase needs to communicate that you “feel” what they’re saying and you’re expressing it in your own way.

### **2E 2E 1M**

Finally, listening involves consistent observation. As you study the habits and behaviors of your leadership and the people on your team, you will begin to pick up on clues for the most effective ways to reach them with your words. Based on the value of this approach, I developed a formula that has worked well over the years. A quick study of human anatomy reveals that most of us have two eyes, two ears and just one mouth. That said, the formula is this: if we listen and observe four times as much as we talk, our talking will probably be four times more effective.

As you move ahead in your leadership career, constantly consider how effective listening will position you to thrive in any environment!

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